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WASHINGTON
U.S. EXPERTS REVISE ESTIMATES
SOVIET-MILITARY SPENDING

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U.S. government specialists on the Soviet Union said Thursday Soviet military spending in 1976-1981 rose at a slower rate than they previously had estimated.

These specialists said, however, Soviet research and production facilities expanded rapidly during that same period, suggesting that "we may be facing a new burst of Soviet weapons output."

They spoke with reporters at a briefing under ground rules which forbade use of their names. The briefing followed published reports that Central Intelligence Agency analysts may have overestimated the growth of Soviet defense spending in past years.

The senior U.S. government specialists who watch developments in the Soviet Union acknowledged that an annual review of available evidence persuaded them that Soviet military investment increased by an average of 2 percent a year over the 1976-1981 period, rather than the 3 percent that they had arrived at in the past.

While trying to remain vague on the new evidence which brought them to lower their estimate for that six-year period, these specialists said, for example, they had noted a slight decline in military aircraft production.

But they said this "may mean the Soviets are shifting to new models" and that production may turn upward again.

They emphasized that their re-estimate "means the Soviets are racing ahead somewhat less rapidly" than U.S. intelligence analysts have thought.

They cautioned that over-all Soviet investment, including research and development, was 70 percent higher than that of the United States in 1981 and that the Soviets outspent the United States on strategic nuclear weapons by a 3-1 margin in that same year.

They also reminded reporters that the Soviets had accumulated a huge military establishment by maintaining a high level of investment over the past 20 years.

According to their calculations, the Soviets spent the equivalent of \$222 billion on military equipment in 1981 compared with \$154 billion in outlays by the United States.

The specialists said there could be grounds for optimism if it turns out that the lower rate of Soviet military investment growth were to continue into the 1990s.

They denied reports that there was a difference of opinion between the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency on these revised estimates for 1976-1981.